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THE UNDERDOG HEROES EXPLORATION OF THE WORLD IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S
ROOM

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ABSTRACT

Canadian Literature is an eminent study among the other literatures in the world. Emma Donoghue has given a remarkable impression in Canadian Literature. She is a novelist, short story writer, playwright, and literary historian. Her novel *ROOM* is based on the real life incident of Fritzl case in Austria, where Josef Fritzl, imprisoned and physically assaulted his daughter for twenty four years in the basement of his house. The novel has been translated into thirty-five languages. Emma Donoghue has portrayed Jack, a five year old boy who lives with his Ma, in 11'x 11' single, locked room and explores the real world outside the four walls after struggling much. The story is narrated through the voice of the innocent Jack to demonstrate the real pains faced in their life. The main aim of this paper is to expose how Jack and his Ma suffered in their life and how they overcome everything by starting an independent life.

Key Words: Oppression, Struggle, Complications, Independence, Self-Discovery.

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Emma Donoghue is a successful writer in Canadian Literature. In most of her writings, she deals with domestic thrillers and historical background. The novel *ROOM* is a biography of Felix in the Fritzl case. This novel reveals how Jack and his Ma, faced so many hardships to come up with and without the support of the society. This work provides a clear picture of an unconditional bond between a mother and son.

The novel begins in the 11x11 feet room, were Jack turns five years old on his birthday. Jack was very curious about gift, when his Ma informed him. Ma gifted a drawing of Jack and he was amused by it. He pinned down it in the wardrobe where Old Nick cannot see. Old Nick is the man who owned the mother and son. Like other kids, Jack also watches Dora the Explorer and Sponge Bob but he believed that these cartoon characters are his friends. When Jack asked his mother about her age, Ma replied that she is twenty seven. "I don't think that cheered her up" (17) says Jack. It shows that she is not in a good circumstance to enjoy her life.

"Women aren't real like Ma is, and girls and boys not either. Men aren't real except Old Nick, and I'm not actually sure if he's real for real." (22). Jack feels that there are no real people in the world like Ma and him. When Ma wants to know the height of Jack, they did not have the measuring tape, so Ma herself made a

ruler through recycling “a cereal box from Ancient Egyptian Pyramid, Ma shows me to cut a strip that’s as big as her foot, that’s why it’s called a foot, then she puts twelve little lines”(23) Ma measured Jack as three feet three inches height. Then they both measured the room and it was eleven feet. This incident depicts the undisputed motherhood in her, though they are in need of basic facilities. Jack knows that “Vegetables are all real but ice cream is TV, I wish it was real too.” (25) These are the expectations of the five year old kid, who brought up inside four walls. For the preparation of Birthday Cake they do not have the eggs to mix, so they use snake’s eggs. When Jack cries for the candle in the cake, Ma consoles him by saying that Old Nick have to go to stores to buy the candle. Jack laughed and said “He doesn’t go in stores. Stores are in TV.”(29) This shows that Jack sees everything as a fake. Every night when the door makes beep sound, there comes Old Nick with a cold air. Before Old Nick’s arrival, Ma makes Jack to sleep in the wardrobe and he pretends to sleep. He lays awake and counts the creaking sound of the bed made by Old Nick.

Day by day, Jack questioned Ma about everything he watches in TV. One day Ma burst out that what they see on TV is the pictures of real things. Jack is astonished by Ma’s answer. He finds hard to believe that there is the world outside the room. Watching T.V. News, and everything he started to raise questions about various things. “Ma is that real?”(82) He becomes very furious towards the outside world. One day, when Ma requested a fan to be fixed, Old Nick sarcastically mentions that “Let’s start all the neighbors wondering why I’m cooking up something spicy in my workshop”(85) In order to refuse the request, he just listed out that the “Above ground, natural light, central air, it’s a cut above some places, I can tell you. Fresh fruits, toiletries, what have you, click your fingers and it’s there. Plenty girls would thank their lucky stars for a setup like this, safe as houses. Specially with the kid”-(86) As soon as, he said that Ma apologized him. Old Nick squeaks the bed as usual and then left. This action proves that he does not care about anything. He just visits the room to fulfill his sexual hunger. Jack could not understand what was happening to his Ma. His pure innocence was evident when he kept on counting the shaking of the bed till Old Nick stopped.

In a stage, Jack gets a doubt that whether he and his Ma are real.

“Outside has everything. Whenever I think of a thing now like skis or fireworks or islands or elevators or yoyos, I have to remember they’re real, they’re actually happening in Outside all together. It makes my head tired. And people too, firefighters teachers burglars babies saints soccer players and all sorts, they’re all nearly in Outside. I’m not there, though, me and Ma, we’re the only ones not there. Are we still real?” (88)

He finds difficult to understand which is real and fake when Ma told the story. His face is scrunched up from trying to differentiate which is real and unreal. When Ma told about her own family, Jack questioned her that “You actually lived in TV one time?” Ma, really struggles to explain him about everything “I told you, it’s not TV. It’s the real world, you wouldn’t believe how big it is.”(105) When Jack heard this he tells Ma to get out of this place to experience the world. Ma assures him that Old Nick will not let them out. “We’re like people in a book, and he won’t let anybody else read it”(112) It is evident that, Ma clearly understood the character of Old Nick. Ma reminds her past when she was nineteen years old college student. She also tells him that she was kidnapped by Old Nick in a truck and brought in here. She explained the unique features of the room “Actually it was a garden shed to begin with. Just a basic twelve- by-twelve, vinyl-coated steel. But he added a soundproofed skylight, and lots of insulating foam inside the walls, plus a layer of sheet lead, because lead kills all sound. Oh, and a security door with a code.”(106) She tried to get out of the room, but it was impossible for her because, “When he was at work I tried to get out, I tried everything. I stood on tiptoe on the table for days scraping around the skylight, I broke all my nails. I threw everything I could think of at it but the mesh is so strong, I never even managed to crack the glass.”(118) Jack promoted Ma to attack Old Nick, Ma said it’s a bad idea, because she attempted already about a year and a half. She threatened Old Nick by pressing the knife against his throat to give the code of the door. Unfortunately, he twisted her wrist and injured her. If she ever carries out a stunt like that again, he would leave her hungrier until she is dead.

Ma dreams to get out of the room. She even assures Jack that he would love the wonderful world and encouraged him, to accompany her in the plan to escape from the room. Ma teaches Jack to pretend as if

he is sick. When Old Nick came Ma begged him to take Jack to the Hospital or to bring a doctor. Old Nick left the room without any answers. Next day, Ma carried out plan 'B'. In this plan, Jack pretends that he was dead. So Old Nick took him in a sack so as to bury him. By that time, Jack escaped from the truck. At that moment he was caught and bitten by a dog. Before it could kill him, the master of the dog Mr. Ajeet pulled his dog back. In the meanwhile Old Nick took him in his arms and moved swiftly. Ajeet felt something strange, so he called Police. As soon as he called the cops, Old Nick escaped in his truck leaving Jack in the road.

Jack stunned to see the real people, trees, baby and dog just like on TV. He struggled much to answer the questions of the cops. When they asked for his age, he just showed his five fingers. Then they asked, where he lives? He said that he lives in a room. He also mentioned that the room is not located in any map. After that, Jack explained about their Great escape plan to the Police. They understood the situation and proceeded to search the room with the help of three stop signs and a turn stated by Jack. Within the few minutes, the cops saved Ma from the room by exploding the digital door with a gun. Ma was in cloud nine when she was released from that dungeon by her son Jack. Ma showered her kisses on her beloved son and said "You saved me"(192). They shared their happiness and victory to each other. Ma, expressed her ecstasy. Their hard work and their hope fetched them success.

They were taken by the Police authority after the rescue from the room. While entering the office, they were captured in camera by the media people. It was the first time in Jack's life he happened to see so many people. At that time, Jack felt that, "There's persons everywhere not friends of mine"(198). These words in his mind reveal the alienated feeling in him. Ma, detailed her bitter experiences with Old Nick. Then, they were sent to Cumberland Clinic for the normal recovery. While peeping through the window, he could see more cars, buildings and people walking in the road. He puzzled whether they are real. It was a hard task of the mother to make him believe that everything is real in this earth. Jack confessed that "I try and believe it but it's hard work."(219) Jack experienced the nature for the first time when he walked on the grass with Ma. He saw hundreds of flowers not in bunch which he received with the mail, but in nature. "I'm squishing the green spikes under my shoes. I bend down and rub, it doesn't cut my fingers. I watch the grass again, there's a twig and a leaf that's brown and a something, it's yellow"(263). It was the first time when Jack immersed with nature.

One day, Jack was taken out for shopping by his uncle and Aunt Deana. It was the first experience of Jack. He wanted to have whatever he saw. His aunt reminded him that "We bought you a bag already, that's it for today, OK? We're just looking for a present for Bronwyn's friend, then we can get out of here"(306) This unexpected answer pricked his little heart. The mistake does not lie on his part, since he is very new to everything. As, Jack was a stranger to the world, he learnt the manners day by day. After the Press meet, Ma attempted to commit suicide with a broken heart. Grandma took care of Jack, when Ma was under treatment. He was under a state of confusion that whether his Ma is alive or dead. He said, "Because, if she's not, I don't want to be either"(316). These hard words melted his grandma's heart and made the tears jump out. If he did not like something also he just said "It was interesting"(326). Even though his Ma is away from him, he was practicing the manners taught by her.

After hearing Ma was stable, Jack felt relaxed. He enjoyed in jumping, climbing, and swinging in the playground along with his grandma. Then he learnt to capture pictures in camera. He cut his ponytail off. While Jack was painting on the kitchen table, he was totally flabbergasted to see his Ma right behind him. Ma hugged him tightly with tears. Later, grandma dropped Ma and Jack in their new apartment INDEPENDENT LIVING RESIDENCE FACILITY. They practiced to live in two rooms. Jack in Jack's room and Ma lives in her room. Ma started to meet her old friends by travelling alone. Few months later, Ma and Jack went to visit their old room. There Jack found everything had been changed in that room. He happened to find the room smells weird, bed without sheets, cabinets without plates and cutlery and chairs were folded up. He felt the room was so smaller than the present sophisticated room in his residence and said "I guess this really was Room one time. But not anymore"(400). They said "Good-bye, Room" and left. Finally their dark life turned into a bright one.

Throughout the novel, the mother protected her son in each circumstance and the son tried his best to save his mother. Without Ma's ideas, Jack would have never survived and without Jack's effort, Ma would have never ever escaped. At last, they had done it together. They not only came out of that room, but also they learnt to live their life like other people. Throughout the novel, they did not give up their hope and unconditional love in them. The love and hope raised them to achieve the status of underdog heroes.

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